

Naval Hospital Bremerton Pharmacy Implements New Innovations

Efforts Include Program to Safely Handle Discarded Medications

NAVAL HOSPITAL BREMERTON'S (NHB) pharmacy has recently implemented two innovative programs to safely handle discarded medications and help dispense pre-ordered prescriptions.

NHB is piloting a patient medication takeback program. A 'MedSafe' medication disposal container is now located in the outpatient pharmacy lobby and is available during normal hours of operation.

According to Sharon Marker, NHB Pharmacy Inventory Manager, anyone who has medication that they don't want or need can bring them in to dispose of properly.

"We did this so anyone who has been holding expired medications or drugs they no longer need will have a safe, convenient, and responsible means of disposing of them," said Marker.

Acceptable medications for disposal include pills, tablets, capsules, ointments, creams, lotions, and powders. Liquid medicines no more than four ounces may also be disposed of, but must be in their original containers, wrapped in a paper towel and sealed in a plastic bag before being placed in MedSafe.

"We do accept Schedule II-V substances now like Percocet, so patients no longer need to go to the Kitsap County Sheriff's office. Also, our providers can now instruct patients to dispose of their medication in the bin if they feel they should no longer be on it. That said, our staff will not take medications from patients and dispose of it for them," said Lt. Zachery Hearn, NHB Pharmacy Officer.

"We don't accept sharps, including auto-injectors like epinephrine, fluids over four ounces, or aerosols including albuterol inhalers. These things must be disposed of by the patients," continued Hearn. (Note: Sharps are defined as needles, syringes, scalpels, lancets, and intravenous tubing with needles attached.)

MedSafe is not for illicit drugs specifically Schedule 1 controlled substances—drugs or another substance with a high potential for abuse—such as marijuana, cocaine, heroin, and methamphetamine.

The program is also not for chemotherapy waste or other medical waste in receptacles. Other items not taken include batteries, aerosol spray cans, trash or hazardous materials, alcohol or hydrogen peroxide, mercury thermometers, or chemicals.

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—Sharon Marker

“This is a great program—proof that the Navy is serious about protection of the environment,” said Ramon Calantas, NHB Environment Technician, citing a U.S. Geological Survey report that found contaminants from pharmaceuticals have been detected in water and soil worldwide.

“Chemicals in medications enter the environment through secretion and disposal of unused pharmaceuticals in sewers, septic tanks, and landfills. Treatment plants are not equipped to remove the pharmaceutical compounds before releasing them into local waters. Disposal of pharmaceuticals into landfills only postpones the pollution of groundwater—eventually they will leach into the groundwater. Proper disposal of unused and unwanted pharmaceuticals will reduce the amount of pharmaceutical compounds flowing into our waterways. Collection and incineration is the best alternative to reduce the flow of pharmaceuticals into the environment,” concluded Calantas.

Along with the new MedSafe disposal option, NHB employees with Department of Defense prescription benefits can access the command’s internal web-based SharePoint site to submit refill requests. This is an additional option to the telephone refill line and TRICARE online.

The service is for NHB employees that have pharmacy benefits and Composite Health Care System (CHCS) prescriptions. The service processes refills or new prescriptions already entered by the provider into CHCS to be picked up at NHB’s outpatient pharmacy.

Lt. Cmdr. Eric Parsons, NHB Pharmacy Department head, confirms that the idea for this service was discussed during leadership rounds, where it was discovered a similar capability was already in place at Naval Hospital Camp Lejeune.

“We contacted the folks at Naval Hospital Camp Lejeune and then set about to make it happen here. Will Seward took it on to develop the program while the pharmacy validated its functionality and determined that it was robust enough to implement at NHB. Peggy Hall from NHB’s Information Management Department was a huge help. This service directly benefits staff, as well as their



Medication disposal is now available at NHB, accepting consumer unused or expired prescribed controlled and non-controlled medications, such as over-the-counter dispensed medications. Accepted for disposal are pills, tablets, capsules, ointments, creams, lotions, powders, and liquid medicines no more than four ounces.

families, by eliminating a step and saving time,” said Parsons. (Note: To use this service, prescriptions—whether refills or new prescriptions—must already be in the system.)

“There still might be times that the pharmacy will have to contact the staff member to discuss the medication request. We could have questions on the therapeutics of the order, such as ensuring the person is aware of potential side effects,” added Parsons.

These two innovative programs at NHB’s pharmacy continue to improve convenience and experience to better serve Sailors, Marines and their families—one unneeded prescription drop-off and one needed medication pickup at a time. [↗](#)

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